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Message Text

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PAGE 01 DACCA 00163 101032Z
ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 AID-05 OMB-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 INR-07
NSAE-00 PA-01 USIA-06 PRS-01 SP-02 /034 W
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R 100923Z JAN 77
FM AMEMBASSY DACCA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 3196
INFO AMCONSUL CALCUTTA
AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD
AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI

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E.O. 11652 N/A
TAGS: PGOV, PINT, BG
SUBJ: UNION PARISHAD ELECTIONS

1. UNION PARISHAD (COUNCIL) ELECTIONS ARE SCHEDULED TO BEGIN JANUARY 13 AND CONTINUE THROUGH JANUARY 31. THE PARISHAD IS THE BASIC ADMINISTRATIVE UNIT IN THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT STRUCTURE AND MAY CONTAIN AS MANY AS A DOZEN OR MORE VILLAGES. IN ADDITION TO BEING LOCAL ADMINISTRATORS, THEIR RESPONSIBILITIES RECENTLY HAVE INCLUDED COORDINATION WITH THE FOOD FOR WORK PROGRAM AND OTHER ECONOMIC DEVEOPMENT PROGRAMS. GENERAL ZIA HOPES TO USE THE PARISHADS AS A GRASS ROOTS DEVELOPMENT AGENCY AND HAS PLANS FOR THE TRAINING OF MEMBERS IN THIS FUNCTION.

2. EACH PARISHAD WILL HAVE TWELVE MEMBERS, INCLUDING TEN MEMBERS ELECTED DIRECTLY AND TWO WOMEN NOMINATED BY THE GOVERNMENT SUB-DIVISIONAL OFFICER OF THE RESPECTIVVE AREA. FOR THE FIRST TIME, PARISHAD CHAIRMEN WILL BE DIRECTLY ELECTED RATHER THAN CHOSEN FROM AMONG THE MEMBERS OF THE PARISHAD, AS WAS THE PREVIOUS PRACTICE. TRADITIONALLY,
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PARISHAD MEMBERS, WHO WILLBE ELECTED FOR FIVE YEAR TERMS, CAMPAIGN ON A NON-PARTISAN BASIS, EMPHASIZING MERELY THEIR STATUS AS INFLUENTIAL LOCAL LEADERS. THE CURRENT ELECTIONS AGAIN WILL BE TECHNICALLY NON-PARTISAN, ALTHOUGH, OF COURSE, THE POLITICAL PERSUASION OF EACH CANDIDATE WOULD BE COMMON KNOWLEDGE LOCALLY.

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3. THE PRESS HAS CARRIED A NUMBER OF ARTICLES CONCERING THE PARISHAD ELECTIONS, INCLUDING EXHORTATIONS SUCH AS: "VOTE FOR HONEST AND PATRIOTIC CANDIDATES IN THE UNION PARISHAD ELECTIONS AND SHUN THOSE WHO PATRONIZED FAVORITISM AND CORRUPTION IN THE PAST AND AMASSED WEALTH IN THE NAME OF SERVICE TO THE PEOPLE." GENERAL ZIA AND SEVERAL COUNCIL OF ADVISORS MEMBERS ALSO HAVE ISSUED PERIODIC CALLS TO ELECT HONEST MEN. AS AN ADDED MEASURE, PRESIDENT SAYEM ISSED ON DECEMBER 29TH THE LOCAL GEVERNMENT ORDINANCE,WHICH REQUIRES THAT ALL CANDIDATES SUBMIT DECLARATIONS OF THEIR ENTIRE ASSETS BEFORE ASSUMPTION OF OFFICE.

4. THE PARISHAD ELECTIONS HAVE BEEN PUBLICIZED EXTENSIVELY. HOWEVER, IN SPITE OF THE PUBLICITY, THE APPROACHING ELECTIONS HAVE GENERATED LITTLE ENTHUSIASM. PERHAPS THE REASON FOR SUCH LIMITED ENTHUSIASM IS SIMPLY THAT MANY OF THE CANDIDATES, AS INFLUENTIAL LOCAL LEADERS, ARE MEN WHO HAVE HELD PARISHAD POSITIONS FOR YEARS OR COME FROM FAMILIES WHO HAVE TRADITIONALLY HELD LOCAL POWER.

5. ONE COMPLAINT RAISED IN THE INDEPENDENT ITTEFAQ HAS BEEN THAT THERE ARE TOO FEW POLLING PLACES. ITTEFAQ EDITOR ANWAR HOSSAIN ATTRIBUTES THIS TO BDG'S CONCERN ABOUT SECURITY AND SAID THAT HE BELIVES ELECTION PERIOD COULD BE TIME FOR INCREASED "MISCREANT" ACTIVITY. THERE ARE INDICATIONS OF TIGHTER SECURITY AS THE POLLING DATE APPROACHES. MASTERS

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